

## FOREWORD

The remaining pristine wetlands of the world lie in the tropical and southern parts of the globe. If they are to be saved, to serve - in the words of the preamble to the Ramsar Convention - as "regulators of water regimes", as "habitats supporting a characteristic flora and fauna", and as "a resource of economic, cultural, scientific and recreational value," their situation, extent and condition must first be carefully documented. Only then can national and international plans for conservation be realistically drawn up, priorities established and strategies implemented. It is the purpose of the present Directory to lay, for the Neotropical Realm, the necessary groundwork of identification. The first such directory was the Directory of Western Palearctic Wetlands, compiled by Erik Carp for IUCN and UNEP in 1980. This helped to stress the great losses of natural wetlands that have occurred in the developed countries. A Directory of African Wetlands is nearing completion and one on Asian Wetlands has just been begun. For North America, the wetlands of Canada and the U.S.A. are being mapped in ever greater detail.

The present Directory was initiated at the IWRB meeting in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1982, attended by participants from many states in South and Central America. There it was agreed to produce a report on the current status of wetlands of the Neotropics, including the Caribbean, with particular emphasis on their avifauna and management. The data base thus established could then be continuously updated. The project was initiated in April 1983, and funding generously provided by both governmental and non-governmental bodies: Canadian Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited Inc., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildfowl Foundation Inc. and World Wildlife Fund; they will, we are sure, feel they got good value for their contributions. A considerable boost to the project was given by the IWRB meeting in La Rabida, Spain, in May 1983, attended by participants from thirteen countries of the Neotropical Realm. The final text was reviewed and improved at another IWRB meeting, this time in Paracas, Peru, in February 1985, with twenty-five of the region's countries directly represented. The report of the Paracas meeting contains a discussion of the project and a preliminary analysis of some of the findings.

Although the main action has been through IWRB, close collaboration was maintained with colleagues in ICBP and IUCN and this has been a truly co-operative enterprise of these international bodies. But they could have achieved little had not so many people in so many countries made freely available their time and their records. It is a particular matter for congratulation that the co-ordinator, Derek Scott, his assistant Montse Carbonell and nearly three hundred collaborators have been able to bring together and analyse such a mass of material in just two short years. Quite apart from its intrinsic value, the preparation of the Directory has greatly stimulated the interest in and concern for the threatened wetlands of the region. It has had impact at all levels from governments to individuals.

More and more countries are adhering to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, known as the Ramsar Convention after the small town in Iran where it was initiated. Already thirty-eight countries are guiding the wise use of their wetlands under the constraints of the Convention and, in particular, have set aside for conservation 302 sites covering twenty million hectares of prime wetland. The Directory of Neotropical Wetlands has always been intended as a "shadow" list of sites eligible for designation under the Convention. It is greatly to be hoped that, as a result of the Directory, the surge in public awareness of wetlands can be maintained and that more states of South and Central America and the Caribbean will join the Ramsar Convention.

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